

Kyodan

News Letter

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OKINAWA SEMINAR

As a step toward increased mutual understanding and cooperation between the Kyodan at large and its Okinawa District, a seminar sponsored jointly by the Kyodan Commission on the Mission of the Church and Okinawa District, was held January 7 - 11 in Naha on the theme, "The Present Situation in Okinawa and the Issues of the 1970's". It was attended by fifty-seven voluntary participants from Japan, most of them at their own expense, and seventy-five pastors and laymen of Okinawa District.

Using Yashio-so, seminar house of the Teachers' Cooperative as hotel and meeting hall, the members of the seminar met for lectures and discussions, featuring as speakers Chobyo Yara, Chief Executive of the Ryukyu Government, Shin-ai Kyan, Chairman of the Teachers' Union, and the writer, Tatsushiro Oshiro. They were also given an opportunity to see Kadena, the huge U. S. air base where the dread B-52's are stationed, visit the cemetery at Mabuni on Okinawa Island's southern tip where, in July 1945, the remnants of the defending Japanese army finally retreated into caves and died by suicide or flame throwers, and to attend a rally of several thousand military base workers concluding a 48-hour strike to protest mass dismissals and demand longer prior notice of dismissal and higher severance allowance.

The central issue of the seminar was the reversion of Okinawa to Japan and the importance of this step as an acknowledgment of basic human rights for the sake, not only of the Okinawan people themselves, but of all mankind. The struggle for unconditional reversion and removal of military bases was seen as part of the wider effort for preservation of Japan's peace constitution and, as far as the church was concerned, for the implementation of the Kyodan Declaration of War Responsibility, with its emphasis on abandonment of armament and war as national policy. Anxiety was expressed by the Okinawan members concerning the status and treatment of the Okinawans by Japan after reversion and the possibility of commercial exploitation and racial discrimination such as had been experienced in the past.

ACTIONS AT THE 10th (SPECIAL) STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE KYODAN

The Kyodan's Standing Committee held its 10th meeting, an extra-ordinary session, at the Christian Center in Tokyo on January 12-13, 1970 (the second session since the November 25-26, 1969 General Assembly). One of the main purposes of the meeting was to continue to study and evaluate the above mentioned Assembly. Five Standing Committee members introduced an "Opinion" paper as a bill in which an attempt was made to summarize what had happened during the General Assembly and to assign responsibility for the inability of the Assembly to conduct formal business. It was voted to print the "Opinion" in the official weekly of the Kyodan, "The Kyodan Times," and to table the bill until the next Standing Committee Meeting to be held in February. During the interim members are to study the "Opinion" and comment from the churches is invited.

TAKASAKI RESIGNS AS KYODAN VICE-MODERATOR

The resignation of Reverend Takeshi Takasaki, Vice-Moderator of the Kyodan, was approved with regret by the Standing Committee on January 12th. Rev. Takasaki, President of the barricaded strike-bound Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in Mitaka, Tokyo,

gave as his reason that his full energies were needed at the Seminary to seek for solutions to the problems they are confronting there.

The first item of business for the Standing Committee as they re-convened on the morning of January 13, 1970, was the election of a new Vice-Moderator. On the first ballot, of the five men who received votes, no one obtained a majority. Receiving votes were Kichiya Kikuchi, Kikaku Shimamura, Yoichiro Saeki, Takashi Oku and Tomomi Kimura. Before a second ballot could be cast, a group of pastors and laymen arrived who had requested permission to enter as observers and to participate in debate related to the Christian Pavilion at Expo '70. Both Rev. Kikuchi and Rev. Shimamura stated they would be unable to accept the position of Vice-Moderator and the balloting for this position was postponed until a later date.

MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATIONS EXAMINATION POSTPONED

The Standing Committee accepted the recommendation of the Committee on Ministerial Training and Qualifications to postpone the regular Spring examination of ministerial candidates for ordination or licensing. It was suggested that the examination be postponed until early in the fall of 1970 unless conditions improved to make possible giving them at an earlier date.

While the report was being given by Committee Chairman Rev. Sadaaki Ogawa, four students of the Theological Department of Kwansei Gakuin University requested permission to sit in on the meeting and be given opportunity to present their position as it was directly related to the report, and this was granted.

This problem began when the Kwansei Gakuin Theological Department Faculty asked the Kyodan Qualifications Committee to return their previously submitted recommendation for graduate Kuniaki Sugawara to sit for the examination, thereby disqualifying him as a candidate. Sugawara and other student supporters have protested this action to both the K. G. authorities and the Kyodan. On November 27, 1969, immediately following the Kyodan General Assembly, the students met with the Qualifications Committee and were promised that a "Five Party Meeting" would be called early in January to consider this and other problems related to ministerial qualifications. The "Five Parties" are the Qualifications Committee, the K. G. Theological Department faculty, the three Officers of the Kyodan, leaders of Synods from which the students come, and the students involved. The Students protested to the Standing Committee on January 12th that no date had been set, to which the Chairman of the Qualifications Committee replied that it had been physically impossible to obtain agreement on a date. Thereupon the Standing Committee took responsibility for calling this meeting and the date was set for January 26, 1970, for the "Five Party Meeting."

OKINAWA: INTERNATIONAL FULCRUM by Ian MacLeod

A fulcrum is defined as the support on or against which a lever rests. It is the point on which pressure is brought to bear in effecting the movement of a heavy object by using a lever. Okinawa is just such a point.

Throughout modern history it has been a tool in the hands of people other than Okinawans to promote interests other than those of Okinawa. In 1609, the prince of Satsuma in Kyushu annexed certain of the Ryukyu Islands, though as vassals they were paying tribute to the Emperor of China, and exploited and impoverished the islands by levying a poll tax on its fabric and sugar industries. From 1879, Emperor Meiji kept King Shotai of the Ryukyus as a royal hostage in Japan for the balance of his life. During World War II Okinawa served as a defense bastion for Japan, and after the war, particularly since 1950, as a strategic base for the U. S. A. in its Asian

line of defense against Communist China and its prosecution of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Okinawa has been a piece of real estate, useful to various outside powers who have used it without reference to the wishes or interests of the people who inhabit it, and who, by all the principles governing ownership of land, have the inherent right to determine the use and disposal of their property. The Okinawan people have found themselves to be pawns in the big game of international power politics in which they feel no stake, struggling as they are to eke out a sparse livelihood from the meagre resources of their little archipelago. In a day when international politics were conducted with cynical chauvinism, they could respond only with numb, helpless acquiescence and attempt to continue barely to exist in a world where the two alternatives were survival or extinction.

But international politics today lay claim to a higher principle of operation than the gunboat diplomacy of a former day. They are conducted in a fanfare of idealistic slogans by which the nations proclaim their great concern for freedom and justice and self-determination for all peoples. And once these dynamic ideals have been set loose in the world, they have an explosive power. They give men dreams of self-fulfilment. And when a nation that has been most vociferous in the proclamation of human rights decides that these can be set aside for strategic reasons, notably the defense of its own interests, the continued voicing of idealistic slogans acquires a hollow ring.

However much America feels that the Okinawans ought to be caught up in its program of defending Asia, not to mention America, against Communist aggression, if the Okinawans themselves do not wish to become involved, the question must be raised, "By what right does America impose its program and strategy on another people?"

The reply will be made, "By right of conquest. America, through a war provoked by Japan, captured a part of Japan and, as a victor nation, has a right to retain and use part of the vanquished nation's property as long as its interests and safety continue to be threatened." And this is the rub, for is Okinawa, and has it ever been, part of Japan in the sense of sharing in Japan's prosperity and Japan's responsibility for World War II? The facts of history indicate that the answer is "No".

The well-known Ryukyuan writer and historian Eikishi Yamazato writes in his pamphlet entitled JAPAN IS NOT OUR FATHERLAND, "The fatherland of Okinawans is Okinawa and the people of Okinawa have no fatherland elsewhere." (page 3)

Though Okinawa became one of Japan's prefectures, the people were never treated by the Japanese as fellow Japanese, but always as second class citizens, and to this day the Okinawans resent the superior attitude of Japanese towards them. One of the ironies of history is the desperate sacrifice of the Okinawans in the last-ditch defense of Japan against the invading American forces, when 200,000 Okinawans (one-fifth of the population) were slain in the defense of a fatherland that had done little but exploit and look down on them.

Due, however, to the suppression of the native language and the cultural indoctrination which they have undergone since their absorption into Japan in the last century, the Okinawans have felt that their destiny lay with Japan, and their identity as Japanese took precedence over the old, historic but vulnerable isolated identity as Okinawans, and they have opted and worked for their restoration to Japan as their fatherland. Their feelings are by no means simple ones of loyalty to Japan and a sense of being isolated Japanese. They want to guard their dual identities, their cultural one as Okinawans and their political one as Japanese. Both give them a sense of pride and significance.

At the same time there is the very practical consideration of their economic security. This problem has two aspects, their immediate subsistence which is very much dependent on the present economy that is sustained by the American military presence, and a long range economic viability resting on a stable industrial base.

All these drives of emotional ambivalence and economic necessity combine to make a confused picture for any outsider looking in at Okinawa, and the question is asked, "What is all the fuss over reversion about? Aren't you better off the way you are?"

The workers on military bases seem to be agitating for two mutually conflicting ends. Their union has adopted a policy of promoting reversion to Japan and liquidation of military bases, and yet they are striking against the dismissal of base workers, which would seem inevitable if the bases are to be removed.

Their argument is that they are being laid off, not because bases are starting to close down, but because of a Pentagon policy to reduce expenses. They feel caught in a squeeze by policies made without reference to their welfare, leaving them stranded without adequate alternative employment. A 48-hour strike was held by base workers on January 7-9 to protest the present large scale dismissals and to ask for six months' advance notice instead of the present one month in practice, and a higher scale of severance allowance.

Whether their demands are reasonable or not is an issue secondary to that of their right of collective bargaining. Without this, they are human flotsam, picked up and discarded at the whim of large scale interests, and with no voice in the disposition of their own lives. They, too, want to negotiate terms of employment and dismissal like workers in other countries. They have two goals; the long range one of reversion, autonomy and the establishment of a viable economy based on industry and not on international tension, and the immediate one of bargaining rights and adequate safeguards for their livelihood. It seems ironical that Japan, which bears far more responsibility for World War II than Okinawa ever did, should have been returned to the family of free nations, with all the rights of self-determination for her citizens, while Okinawa, by reason of defeat in the very same war, after 25 years, is still a subject state with very limited powers of self-government. The Okinawans have served their time as a conquered people, they feel, and now after 25 years, they lay claim to a status of full human beings and first class citizens as a basic human right, and not merely as a privilege to be granted by a superior, conquering nation.

This people, downtrodden through the years, are learning lessons about human worth and dignity which we have taught them by our slogans and claims for our own rights, but not by our willingness really to share with them the blessings which we look upon as our own inalienable right. But we cannot take one step without the next and avoid having our slogans hurled in our teeth. The problem of Okinawa can not be dealt with merely in terms of its geographical location and its military strategic value, or even its economic needs, but is above all else a question of the human rights and feelings of its people. Priority placed on any other point is blatant materialistic opportunism.

The Okinawans do not want their islands to be a fulcrum any longer, or a lever, or any other kind of tool in the hands of others, whether they be American generals or Japanese politicians. They want Okinawa for the Okinawans, and who has the right to say they are being unreasonable?

